CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS OF ORISSA SERIES — 2



Saratchandra Debo

SARAT CHANDRA DEBO

EDITOR

DR DINANATH PATHY



WORKING ARTISTS ASSOCIATION OF ORISSA

BHUBANESWAR

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Dedicated
at the lotus feet of
Sadguru
Sri Swami Sivanandji Maharaj

FOREWORD

With a view to project the contemporary artists of Orissa in the national scene, the wroking Artists Association of Orissa has embarked upon a publication programme entitled "Contemporary Artists of Orissa series". This project had been started in the year 1969. Rather it would be more appropriate to say that the working Artists Association of Orissa (in short WA) came into being with the first monograph in the series on Dinanath Pathy, the founder General Secretary of WA. After a lapse of almost two decades, this present monograph on one of the foremost artists of Orissa Sarat Chandra Debo was designed. Misgivings appeared in the minds of WA colleagues whether to call this a series. But some of our friends brought out a logic that since no other organisation Government or private have done anything in this line, it would be worth while for WA to publish the second monograp even after an interval of eighteen years. The first monograph on Dinanath Pathy had been published by the help and assistance of Asit Mukherji in his commercial studio, Silparupam at Cuttack. It had limited copies and the monograph is now exhausted. Reprinting of this monograph is being attempted.

WA is extremely fortunate to be able to bring out this humble but significant publication on Sarat Chandra Debo. Sarat Chandra was a pioneer in the field of contemporary art of Orissa. He was the most dedicated and epoch making painter who was at the head of the contemporary art movement in the state. He was the founder Principal of the two premier art schools of the state at Berhampur and at Khallikote both in his private and official capacity.

We are most thankful to our colleague Dr. Dinanath pathy, Principal, BK College of Art and

Crafts the eminent painter and arthistorian of this state to have edited this monograph. Bipin Behari Sahu, the Vice Chairman of WA has strived a lot to arrange this publication. He deserves our congratulations. We are also thankful to all the wel-wishers of WA who have liberally subscribed to the publication of this book. We hope that this monograph will create the needed awareness in our country about the artist and his works, for a more judicious and better understanding of his unique contributions. We are also happy to annouce that the third monograph, in the series on Orissa's another young and dynamic painter, Siba Panigrahi is ready for release. It is hoped that WA will soon come up with other monographs in the series.

30th October 1987

N. Chandra Sekhar Rao
Chairman, WA

SARAT CHANDRA DEBO

Born with a silver spoon in mouth, in the royal family of Chikitigada in Southern Orissa, Sarat Chandra died a miserable death in the dilapidated palace of Chandra Prabhashram at Berhampur. His life span of sixty two years (1911-1973) is a symbol of dedication for the cause of contemporary art in Orissa.

Sarat Chandra had baen greatly influenced by the rich cultural traditions of his family. His father, Radhamohan Rajendra Debo was a celebrated poet and dramatist. This royal family had unique contributions to the Orissan literature in the field of lyrics, dramaturay and rhetorics. Young Sarat Chandra started his artistic career as a theatre curtain painter, costume designer and makeup man. His association with the theatre group which was producing his father's plays enhanced the quality of theatre production and made the group popular.

Sarat Chandra was brought up in an aristocratic atmosphere of the royal palace hemmed in a picturesque natural setting. He was taught at home by the English tutors and was being trained to become a Bar-at-law which was a fashion of that time. After the death of his father Sarat Chandra refused to ascend the throne of Chikiti although his cousin Goura Chandra was a minor at that time. He preferred to assist him in the administration of the estate. As an administrator he was extremely popular with his pepole.

He was very fond of horse riding in which he was an expert. He used to ride miles and miles a day to supervise collection of taxes. These outings brought Sarat Chandra closer to nature and the

prince artist developed a keen inisght into the character of the people and nature which later reflected in his paintings. Besides horse riding he was equally good at car driving, pollo and tennis.

At the age of twenty three, Sarat Chandra was sent to London by his maternal uncle, the ruler of Kanika to study law. At London Sarat Chandra joined the Inner temple to study Bar-at-law. But the study of law did not interest him. He preferred art to law and joined the Heartherly School of Arts. While studying art at London he had the occasion to travel extensively in Europe and to get acquainted with the classical and contemporary art movements. Besides painting, he took interest in social activities. He was elected the Secretary of the Indian students' union. By his sincere efforts Oriya was included for the first time in the teaching curriculum in London Universities.

After completing Diploma in Art in London, Sarat Chandra sailed back to India in 1938. The situation of art in Orissa was simply deplorable. Orissa was formed into a separate state only in 1936. Sarat Chandra had his humble contributions to the formation of Orissa as a separate province. Alongwith his brother Gourachandra Rajendra Debo, Krishna Chandra Gajapati, King of Paralakhemandi and Rama Chandra Madaraj Deo, the king of Khallikote, Sarat Chandra took active part in the movement.

Sarat Chandra faced a dull, inactive and frustrating art situation in Orissa. There were two streams, the revivalistic trend of Santiniketan and the Western academic style of Calcutta art school. On the other hand, Orissa had a strong artistic tradition evidently alive in its exquisite temples, pata paintings and textiles. The educated were looking to the West for inspiration while there was enough in this land lying unnoticed and neglected, Although Sarat Chandra had been trained in the Western academic style, he had not forgotten the roots of Indian art. He was

determined to pursue a style with the flavour of the indigenous substance but bathed in contemporary world art norms. His ambitions were also inspired by the intense patriotism for the land and the princely exclusiveness. He had before him the exemplery characters like Raja Ravi Varma and Amrita Shergil. These two artists had two divergent approaches but peculiarly influenced Sarat Chandra. Sarat Chadra was also influenced by Durer and he had inhibition for human anatomy.

But Sarat Chandra had in his mind the failures of Raja Ravi Varma as well as the Bengal revivalists. He wanted to free himself from both, but it is left to doubts whether he had no inclinations for Ravi Varma at least in the matter of oil painting portraits. He had all the sympathies for the Bengal revivalists but in order to project similar thematic ideas in a more impressive and personal manner, he created a style which was a fine blending of east and west, western anatomy and prospective adopted to Indian settings, theme and compositions. In this respect he was more close to Amrita Shergill and George Keyt. In this paintings there is a pronounced linear tendency, a flair for construction of forms basing on an anatomical equation of east and west. The colour used in his paintings are pure, selective and limited to white vermilion, ultramarine blue, red ochre, lemon yellow, chrome yellow ochre, gray and rose madder. Except for the few wash paintings which are not done in a revivalistic method but rendered visionary with abandon play of colours on an experimental basis, his paintings otherwise are temperas done with opaque clouring, conceived on huge frames, sometimes of abnormal sizes, the colour scheme of these paintings look antique like the nineteenth century Orissan murals. The colours have been so arranged that only the focal point of the picture is dynamically visible at the outset and the whole narration comes within the purview of the eye subsequently which is a clear revivalistic tendency. This arrangement of colours owe their origin to revivalistic water colour wash paintings

of Bengal School. Only the required Portion in a wash Painting is shown in clear drawings and fresh colours and the rest of the composition in the painting is made hazy by repeated application of mixed colour washes. Following this tradition Sarat Chandra has applied vermilion to the clothings of the central figure Maya in "Birth of Slokachhanda" rose white to the clothings of all the five figures-Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna and Sita in "Rama's Pratyavartana" painting and deep red to the standing figures of the front row of Women in the "Rhythim of the paddy fields"

Sarat Chandra's paintings may be considered in two groups for understanding the psyche of the artist. The first group of paintings executed in his earlier days include mostly the studies of nature like landscapes, seascapes, hillscapes, trees, buildings and the studies of human life like family portraits and royal personalities. He has used both water colours and oils for his studies. It seems that he never bothered to retain the transparency in his water colours. He preferred to treat water colours like opaque tones. This tendency is more visible in his studies executed in tempera colours. Even in his nature and life studies, he attempted to infuse an individual vision. As a result most of his studies look like creative compositions rather than imitated show pieces. The second group of his paintings are mostly temperas and water colour wash paintings. The theme of these paintings have been inspired by puranic tales, philosophic ideologies and religious narrations. He has painted from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagabata as well as from Jesus's life. He had no bias for any religion and he was broad and catholic in selection of themes for his paintings. The paintings of Sarat Chandra are bold, bright, fresh and reminiscent of mural traditions. He loved to organise large composition with a number of figures. His landscapes reveal great depth of fields, emphasis on characters of trees, soil formations and moods of sky and time sequences.

In all his paintings Sarat Chandra made a deliberate attempt to show nude bodies irespective of male and female figures. As a sort of manherlsm all his female figures are at least half nudes. He has an obsession to show well-shaped rounded breasts and anatomical details All his human figures display a dramatic vigour with meaningful hand gestures. Sarat Chandra used to say that nudity was a common scene in India. He had introduced nude studies in the school of Art at Khallikote where he was the principal. Like the Greek masters on one hand he was the worshipper of beauty, youth and vigour in human life and on the other, he had complete realisation of the transitory and impermananty human life. Therefore his obsession to show full bloomed youth has only academic relevance. In spite of western adoptions, the painting style of Sarat Chandra breathe an indigenous air of the soil. What makes these paintings novel are his individualistic approach to the subject matter, narrative deliberations, economisation of forms, bold anuglar lines, tremendous organising skill and novel conceptions.

Sarat Chandra will be ever remembered in the history of this state as the champion for the cause of art education and spiritual renaissance. For the rejuvenation of contemporary art movement, he organised the Utkal Art Association at Cuttack in 1945. From the meagre grant he received after the abolition of Chikiti estate, he managed to organise the first art school in this state in his palace-Chandra Prabhashram at Berhampur. This was the Utkal School of Arts. He had a keen insight to understand talents and during those days he had employed the famous oil painting portrait painter Muralidhar Tali as one of the teachers in his school.

Each year he used to admit thirty students in his institution. To build up this institution he gave his life and soul and it flourished. He used to drive his students in his car for nature studies. His own kitchen used to provide food to most of the needy students. Such a sinceer, noble and committed

attempt for the spread of art education is rare in this country. Yet he is blissfully forgotten and nothing has been done either by the Government or the people of Orissa to perpetuate his memory.

A number of dignitaries like Dr. K. N. Katju, then Governor of Orissa, his advisor B.K. Gokhle, Lingaraj Mishra, then Minister of Education, Orissa, Dr. Pranakrishna Parija, then Vice Chancellor of Utkal University, Radhanath Rath and Nandalal Bose then principal of Kala Bhawan at Santiniketan had visited this institution at different times and have expressed their immense satisfaction over its performance. The remarks of B. K. Gokhale in the visitors' book in the year 1945 has farreaching relevence even for today's Orissa, The text of the remark is reproduced below.

"I was pleased to visit the Utkal School of Arts this morning and to meet its talented founder and Principal Sri S. C. Debo. It has always been a matter of surprise to me that a province with so much artistic talent should be without a school of art. I hope that this new venture will fill up the gap and afford fresh impetus to local aesthetic talent in keeping with contemplated postwar development in Orissa".

Due to financial difficulties and lack of Government patronage this institution was closed around 1953 and was lost into oblivion because Sarat Chandra never talked about it either in private or public.

In 1957, Government of Orissa established the first art school at Khallikote and invited Sarat Chandra to head the institution. Khallikote, a quite place away from the hum drums of the city life by the side of blue Chilika and the palace which housed the school with large tiled halls, wide corridors, sprawling courtyards, honeycombed appartments for students' accomodation, English style

bathrooms, stepped wells, imposing exteriors and impressive entrance surprisingly could not flourish as a centre of art.

In his initial days Sarat Chandra strived hard to build up this institution in the lines of Kalabhawan at Santiniketan. But due to lack of understanding. clarity of purpose among the staff members and due to want of Government patronage this institution deteriorated. A section of teachers and students tried to vilify Sarat Chandra and this editor as a student of this institution remembers the worst days Sarat Chandra had to face and the rarest ability, endurance and benevolence he had displayed to steer this institution out of troubled waters. Sarat Chandra left this school in 1967.

It is lamentable that the premier institution of art of this state which had once received the blessings of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and stewardship of Sarat Chandra now languishes in ruins. The dreams of Sarat Chandra as well as the people of Orissa have been shattered.

Sarat Chandra had a multidimensional personality. He was a person of high ethical and moral values with a compassionate heart and clear understanding from the begining of his career. When the atmosphere of art at Khallikote became polluted with narrow parochial feelings and petty quarrels, Sarat Chandra wanted to purify the air through Satsanga, prayer, meditation and religious discourses.

He organised a branch of the Divine life society at Khallikote. His Holiness Swami Sivananda Saraswati was the president of the divine life society at Rishikesh. Sarat Chandra was an ardent devotee of Swamiji. Swami Sivanandaji's ideologies and philosophies were reflected in the activities of Sarat Chandra and he was more and more withdrawn from the worldly activities and concentrated in spiritual contemplation and meditation. He organised the first all Orissa Divine Life conference at Puri and subsequently at other places. This editor had the great fortune of being

associated with this great soul as the first secretary of the Khallikote divine life society in his spiritual endeavous.

Sarat Chandra in his earlier life had renounced the throne of Chikiti for art and now in later life renounced art to become a saint.

Sarat Chandra is a forgotten name in Orissa. This is due to the reason of his own dislikings for exhibitionism added with an apathetic attitude of the Government to bring the works of the artist to lime-light. It is an irony that with all his benevolent qualities and attempts to develop art in Orissa and a large number of admiress and students he has been pushed to the backgrounds.

All throughout his life, Sarat Chandra practised art as a Sadhana and his princely ego and lately his saintly ego did not ever inspire him to contribute paintings to exnibitions or publications and since his sphere of activity was confined to a higher circle in the society, it hardly reached the common man. Of course he has done a number of oils being commissioned by his relatives who were the ruling chiefs in the principalities in Orissa like Kanika, Khallikote, Dharakote. Surangi, etc. These paintings alongwith the regalia have vanished into the dust. Perhaps he had the maximum number of paintings which in course of time have been lost and still a number of them languish in the deserted appartments of the Chandraprabha Ashram at Berhampur patiently waiting for their final extinction. If miseries and misfortune are the only solace to the creative people on this land, then Sarat Chandra had enough of it in his life time. He had lived in it and has transcended them and has become immortal. We have failed to honour him or recognise him properly. With him passes a phase-the early phase of evolution of contemporary Orissan painting.

With passing away of Sarat Chandra a great painter, an able organiser, an efficient art educationist, an ardent devotee and above all a noble soul passed away from our midst. He was misunderstood when he was alive for he was far ahead of the generation he lived in. He is now being forgotten by every body including his students. All the contemporary artists of the present day Orissa are his students or students of his students.

I hope this small monograph will be a flower of offering at the lotus feet of Gurudev Swami Sivananda and also at the lotus feet of Gurudev Sarat Chandra.



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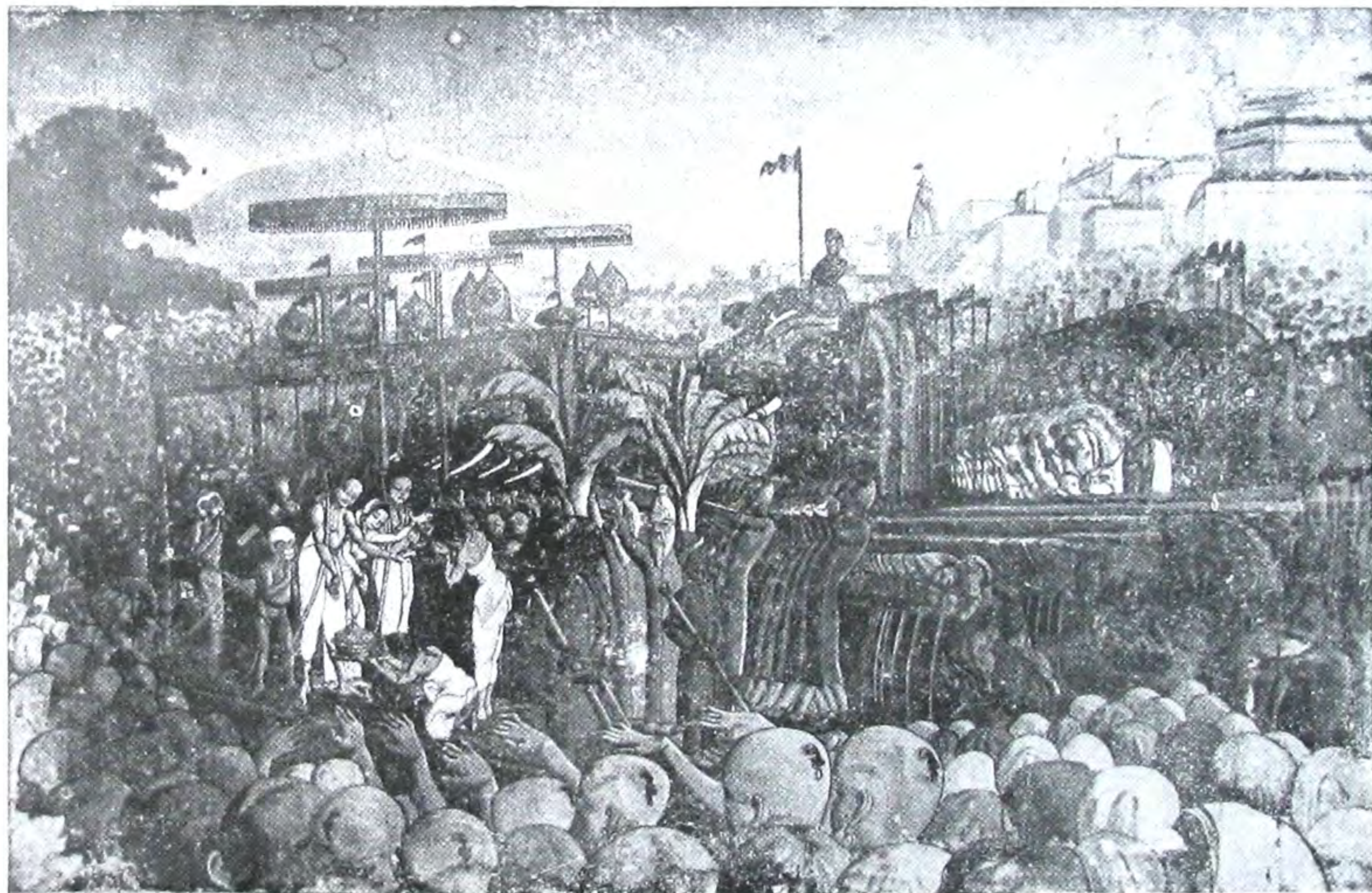
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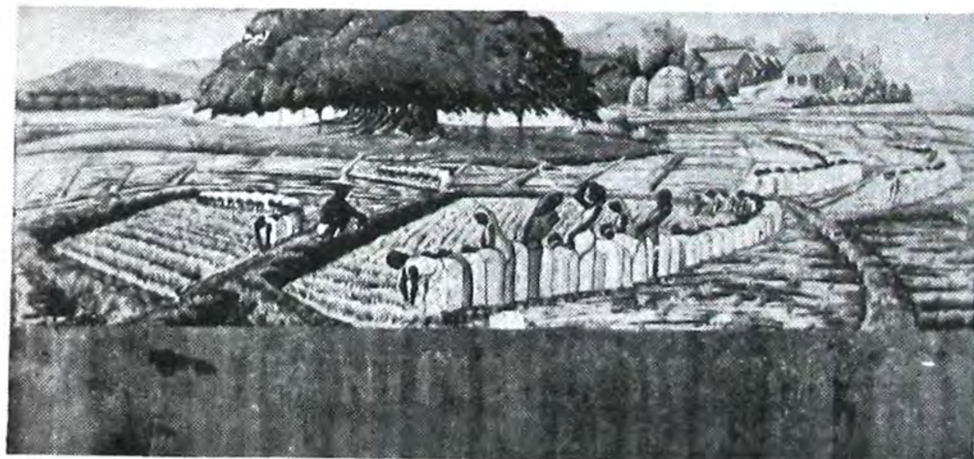




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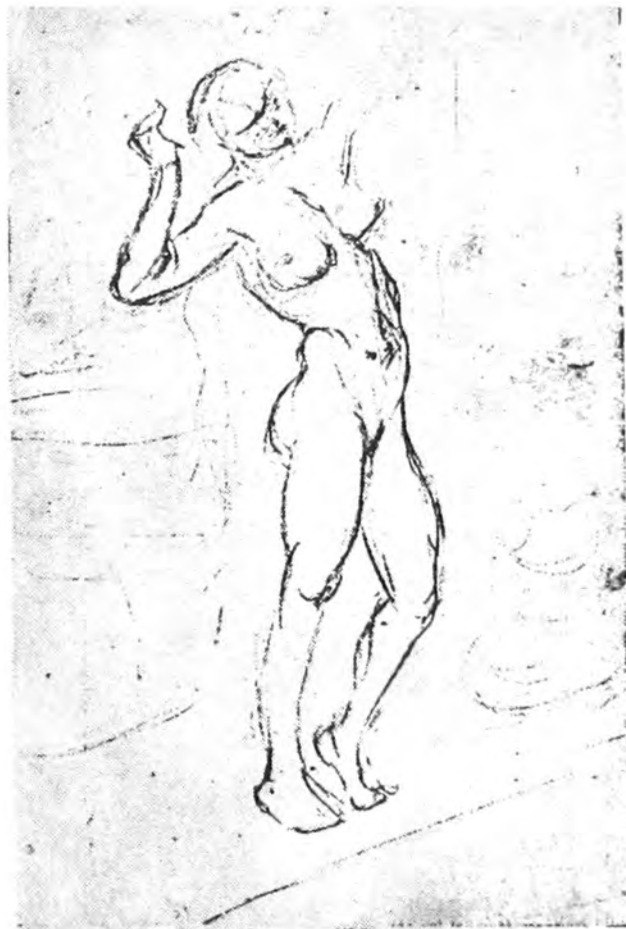
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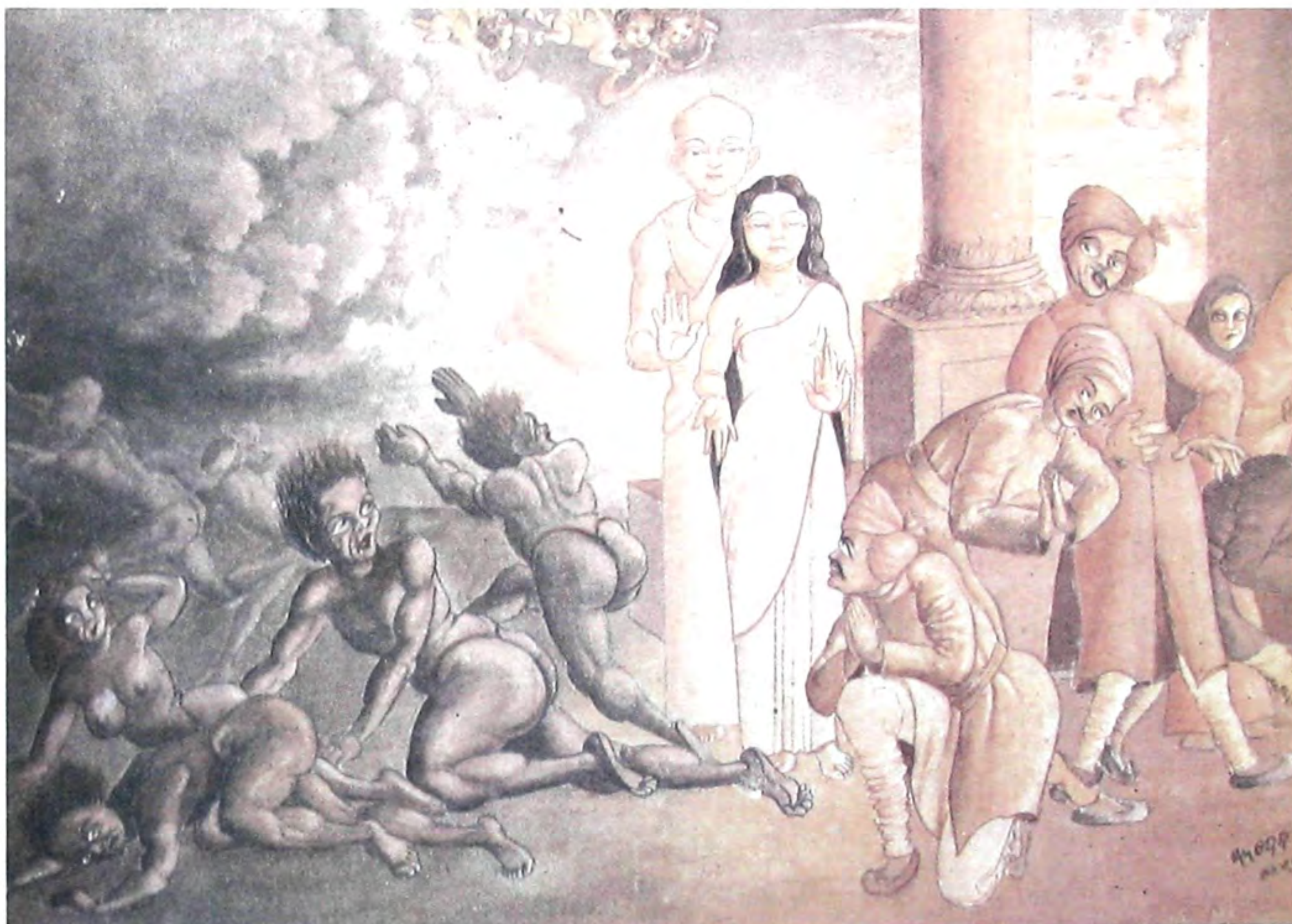








3



A Short note on three of his famous paintings preserved in the Orissa State Museum.

Birth of Sloka Chhanda—(1.49 mt X 0.93 mt.) The first sloka "Ma Nisada" that came out of the mouth of Valmiki in rage at the sight of the pitiable condition of krauncha after the beloved was killed by the hunter (Nissada) is the subject matter of this painting. One will be compelled to read the picture starting from Valmiki, the stalwart cursing the Nisada by pouring water from the conch and thus giving birth to the first chhanda. The painter has taken the help of a few imaginary forms to explain such an abstract conception. The birth of Chhanda has been depicted as a child (fair in complexion) sleeping on a set of palmleaves spread on the ground. The mother Maya, drak in complexion feeding the baby not with her own breast milk but from the water flowing down the conch of Valmiki which passes over her own breast. The whole atmosphere of the Ashram virbrates with the tune of the Chhanda and to suggest this drummers, dancers, violin players, tanpura players with peculiar and defined gestures (bhangis and mudras) and also the dancing peacocks, leaping deers, and swimming white swans symbolical of wisdom have been depicted. Blue is rarely used (only in case of dancing peacocks in the birth of "Sloka Chhanda".) Instead of using blue directly, a method has been devised mixing black with white resulting in a sort of blakish grey and placing it aside of red in an impressionist style to get the required effect.

Rama's Pratyavartana (1.77 X 1.15 mts,) Rama returns to Ayodhya rescuing Sita from Ravana, accompanied by Lakshmana, Bibhisana, Hanumana, Sugriva, Jambavana and the retinue of his army composed of monkeys and bears. Bharata and Satrughna accord him a royal reception

at the outskrits of the city inside a beautiful pavilion. The royal black elephant with mahunta is close by the pavilion. The whole composition is in a traingular form, the eye being led to the spot of activity on the Pavilion where Bharata is handing over the crown to Rama. The most spectacular aspect of this painting is its arrangements. Several rows have been formed beginning with the female attendants in the left half of the painting to the camel soldiers on the right extreme. Following close by the first row are the Rishis, pipe blowers (Kahalias), conch blowers (Sankhuas) infantry, cavalry, camel soldires and elephant riders. Only the first figures in each row have been drawn and the subsequent ones managed by repetition of a few economised lines. Thus they have been made into a pattern, a sort of design. The gathering crowd has also been given a similar treatment, Photographic prespective have been applied to the buildings in the background gradually vanishing at a distance, alongwith distant trees and hills. In the foreground big heads completely shaven except pigtail knots are drawn in such manner as if they stare back to the camera. Hanumana has been diminished to the original size or a monkey with folded hands. There is a similitude of facial construction, and likeness in figures. All the soldiers look alike as well as the Rishis and female attendants. Rama and his brothers are a single form repeated. The use of light and shade not in a restrained manner as is common in Ajanta murals, Mughal and other regional paintings but in a naked play of volume is another Western feature in this painting. Although the total feel of the painting is in the revivalistic format, he has used Western perspective.

Rhythm of the Paddy Fields (1 54mt. X 0.52mt.) The rhythm is contained in the arrangement of women figures planting forming a crescent shape over the muddy fields at five sequences in

the painting. The owner of the fields is watching the work from the bank of the paddy fields. It is interesting to note that only a few (five) figures in the first crescent are in standing posture enjoying a moment of respite. One is stretching her hands, the other wiping sweat from her forehead and the third stretching her back to relax. All the other figures in different rows are in bending posture planting, looking like "dark bodied silnouttes" of Amrita Shergil with Gaugin's accents.

At a short distance a huge banyan tree is shown with a wide ribbed trunk as if placed on a red soil base, To the right of the landscape is a village surrounded by tall tapering trees with a few thatched houses and heaps of straw. The village looks almost deserted as if all the women folk have been out on the fields leaving the little ones behind the doors. One is reminded of the empty village of Keats 'Grecian urn'. On the left side of the village is a river flowing with long stretched sandy beds and mango groves.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

BIODATA

1911	Born in the royal family of Chikitigada in Ganjam District in Orissa.
1934	Went to London to study Bar at law but took admission in Heatherly school of Arts.
1938	Received Diploma in Painting from Heatherly School of Arts, London and Returned to India.
1942	Married to the sister of king of Surangi.
1945	Formed Utkal Art association at Cuttack
1945	Founded Utkal School of Arts at Berhampur.
1957	Appointed first Principal of Govt. school of Art and Crafts at Khallikote.
1962	Represented Orissa in the Central Lalit Kala Akademy.
1963	Received " Guru Bhakti Ratna " title from swami Sivananda Saraswati at Rishikesh.
1967	Retired from the Govt. School of Art and Crafts Khallikote.
1966-1968	President, Central Committee of the Divine life society
1970	Honoured by the Ganjam District Drawing Master's association with " Kalasri" title.
1972	Honoured by State Lalit Kala Akademy.
1972	Three of his best paintings accquaired for the Orissa-State Museum
1973	Died at Chandraprabhashram Berhampur.

Working Artists Association of Orissa (WA)

Established in 1969

Registered in No. 236-75 of 1983-84 under the Society - Act. XXI of 1860

Office bearers 1987

Chairman	—	N. Chandra Sekhar Rao
Vice Chairman	—	Bipin Behari Sahu
General Secretary	—	Sudhansu Sekhar Satapathy
Joint Secretary	–	Ramahari Jena
Treasurer	—	Banaja Kumari Choudhury.
Executive Member	—	Siba Panigrahi,
Executive Member	—	Baladev Maharatha
Executive Member	—	D. N. Rao.
Executive Member	—	Dr. Dinanath Pathy.

Important programmes.

Recognises any and all kinds of experiments in the field of visual art in the state Organises group exhibitions inside and outside the state, Sponsors solo exhibition of young talented artists.

Honours artists for their contributions.

Holds seminars, symposia, talks and artist camps to create art awareness

Publishes an art bulletin in english first of its kind in the state (This is an irregular issue)

Publishes monographs on the contemporary Artists of Orissa.

The following monographs have been published

1. Dinanath Pathy 2. Sarat Chandra Debo 3. Siba Panigrahi

The following monographs in the series to be published in 1988.

4. Chandra Sekhar Rao 5. D. N. Rao

Other important publications. 1. Jagannatha and the Oriya artists

2. The Frozen lake-Art and poetry



Saratchandra Debo